

March 25, 2011

Montana Senate
62nd Legislature – Regular Session
Committee on State Administration
Re: Senate Bill 326

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

My name is Captain Charlie Cromwell, and I strongly support the passage and enactment of Senate Bill 326 ("SB 326"), the "Montana Veterans' Home Loan Mortgage Program Act."

Briefly, my background and the reason I am very interested in SB 326. I am a native Montanan and Iraq War Army vet. I was in a combat arms specialty for 4 years on active duty while serving around the world – from Texas to Germany to Tikrit, Iraq. Upon my separation from full-time service, I wanted to return to Montana because I knew how well our state treats its service members, veterans, and their families. I decided to stay in the Army Reserves and am currently drilling with a unit out of Missoula. I am also about to be married and, while my fiancé and I are looking at purchasing our first home, the current recession makes this a daunting proposition.

When Senator Larsen showed me the SB 326 draft, I instantly recognized its importance and potential to make a difference in many veterans' lives. Given my service background and near-daily interactions with Montana's many guardsmen, reservists, and vets, I recognized that this Act would be most welcome in the service member community. My reasoning is as follows:

- 1) Every generation of America's fighting men and women have been welcomed home with generous support and assistance. The Veterans' Administration, the GI Bill, veterans' workforce assistance programs, and others were created to assist vets with their transitions back to civilian life. While no service member would ask for any support *per se*, bills such as SB 326 are truly invaluable to veterans and their families. Settling down and owning a home is an integral part of the transition – it brings much-needed stability during an often-tumultuous reintegration period. Additionally, it's a terrific opportunity for a grateful nation to give back a little in gratitude for our veterans' sacrifices.
- 2) Many veterans go back to school after returning from stints on active duty. While the GI Bill certainly helps, skyrocketing tuition coupled with supporting family on student loan budgets can lead to heavy debt burdens. Oftentimes this makes purchasing a home through standard private or VA mortgage channels difficult. SB 326 helps alleviate such pressures.

- 3) Like it or not, real estate is still a major component of our economic engine. From a purely economic standpoint, SB 326 provides precisely the type of incentives needed to spark our state's lackluster housing market.

Senator Larsen has worked incredibly hard to create a program that benefits both Montana's veterans and our economy while costing taxpayers very little. I urge the distinguished committee members to work with Senator Larsen and support the passage of SB 326.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Charles Cromwell', with a stylized, cursive script.

Charles Cromwell
Captain
U.S. Army Reserves